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The Specificity Behind the Sparkle: The In's and Out's of Disney Choreography and Park Productions

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**The Specificity Behind the Sparkle:
The In's and Out's of Disney Choreography and Park Productions**

A Thesis

Presented to the Department of Dance

Jordan College of the Arts

and

The Honors Program

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Laura Elizabeth Theisen

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I. Introduction – Illuminating the “Magic”

The Walt Disney Company is known world-wide and their influence can be seen in numerous elements of the entertainment industry. Disney has revolutionized the use of choreography and dance in commercial settings showcasing the value, talent, and passion of the dancer, as well as impacting and inspiring the consumer. And, although The Walt Disney Company makes many of these decisions as marketing strategies, they have truly developed a signature style that can be recognized in their productions. Dance plays a significant role in what makes Disney unique and they use the art form to illuminate the “magic” surrounding Disney productions. Dance exemplifies the trademark characteristics of the Disney aesthetic through its parks and beyond.

An aesthetic is a set of principles underlying and guiding the work of an artistic movement (Oxford Dictionaries). The Walt Disney Company set out to create their own movement and brand to revolutionize the entertainment industry. They laid a foundation supporting their entire franchise based upon enhancing their own style and continuing to adhere to these foundational rules. There is an aura that surrounds every Disney product and when you witness it, there is clearly a Disney philosophy behind it. These underlying qualities and expectations ensure that the integrity of the Disney name endures for generations. Walt Disney made the claim that Disneyland was “The Happiest Place on Earth” and the company strives to meet these high expectations every day (Wasko). Disney created the formula required for customer satisfaction through their foundational rules and aesthetics. Although the style or medium may change according to the generation of the artists, certain elements will remain consistent.

The purpose of this thesis is to define and explore the Disney Philosophy and the critical foundational rules and aesthetics needed to maintain the Disney brand....so this leads to the question - what are the defining characteristics of the Disney aesthetic and how does dance exemplify these trademarks through the parks and beyond?

The ability to have such a strong framework and company-wide style is one of the key synergies to Disney, and this underlying synergy is truly demonstrated day-in and day-out through their “constructing a story for its guests that is the same wherever and whenever it is encountered” (Lantzer xv). People may not know exactly what they are going to experience when they visit the Disney theme parks or see a Disney production, but they count on a certain standard or expectation that the name guarantees, and people are rarely disappointed. The primary purpose of the Disney aesthetic is to ensure customer satisfaction and build guest devotion, and this, in turn, enhances the value of the Disney commercial franchise. They place an extreme emphasis on consistency in all their productions so that each performance has the same gusto regardless of whether it is at 2pm or 5pm, today, tomorrow, or next year (Lantzer xx). The process and dedication to the foundational rules also brings joy to the Disney cast members themselves. There is a sense of purpose, pride, and fulfillment in their work by being able to be a part of the famed “Disney Magic.”

II. The Disney Aesthetic

The Walt Disney Company has remained an industry leader for almost 100 years and no other entertainment company has been able to reproduce or come close to the quality of Disney’s productions (Avenger). This is no coincidence. The Walt Disney Company has certain standards and expectations that are maintained across all productions. Dance is a major component of Disney’s underlying company structure and strategy and it is a critical vehicle to present the

foundational elements of Disney. Through dance, Disney is able to establish a sense of nostalgia, explain the narrative, emphasize the music, exemplify their consistency, and interact with the guests in a special way. These key components are present in all Disney productions at their theme park parades, castle performances, and park stage shows.

The moment a guest walks through the gate and experiences the bright colors of Main Street USA, they leave the normal world behind and enter a land of magic and nostalgia that only Disney can provide. The sense of familiarity can be felt through every aspect of the park, whether it is the smell of the Main Street Bakery or the thrill of flying through space on Space Mountain. The nostalgia is created from “drawing upon the memories that guests and cast members make together via the experiences of being at the park” (Lantzer xvi). Disney strives to create attachment that goes beyond nostalgia and encourages their guests to share their experiences with others and return year-after-year to relive the fond memories while also forging new bonds with the parks. The park productions are vital to the expression of such emotions.

Parades such as the *Main Street Electrical Parade* are part of Disney’s history. The parade first premiered on June 17, 1972, (disneyparks.disney.go.com) and since then, it has been retired and revamped a multitude of times. Each time Disney removes the magical nighttime parade, with its catchy and memorable music and mesmerizing lights, a large number of Disney guests are rather upset that a piece of history has been removed and it is soon reestablished. The Walt Disney World parade *Paint the Night* was Disney’s attempt at revamping and reinventing the classic with a remix of the beloved music and similarly lighted floats, but nothing can replace the nostalgia and magic of the original. The *Main Street Electrical Parade’s* most current return began at the beginning of August 2019 and ran until the end of the year.

The Disney park productions all follow the premise of a greater narrative than the characters' original stories. As an example, the theme park shows are one of the rare occasions where Minnie Mouse and Cinderella could be working together to defeat a source of evil. When the minds of the Disney imagineers and directors get together to design new shows they "start with a great story...whatever the source, the story needs to have 'legs' -- a mix of timelessness and broad appeal" (Malmberg 26). "The baseline for Disney standardization is to keep the moral element of good versus evil, even if you have to alter and condense the rest of the story" (Lantzer 86). The narrative can be successful even if it is very simple, but the importance is how the story is revealed. All show narratives must attract the whole family, but what makes Disney's storylines unique are the ability of the story to be understood at different levels regardless of age (Bogaert).

One of the most distinguishable and universally loved products of Disney entertainment is the catchy and classic Disney music. Everyone's childhood was touched in some form or another by Disney music whether it was a sing-a-long VHS or Disney channel radio. The Walt Disney Company has been writing and producing hits since 1937 with the release of *Snow White* and has continued to create songs that create lasting impacts through movies, such as *Frozen* and *Moana*. Besides Disney's ability to create songs to last a lifetime, they also are known for spinning their own songs in different ways to create special adaptations for the Disney theme parks. In Disney park productions, the music is the guide that takes the guests on a journey with their favorite characters. Every parade has a song specifically created for the parade to start the show off right with the catchy and familiar adaptations of classic park music, which distinguishes the Disney productions from all others, including local community parades and other theme parks.

The *Mickey's Soundsational Parade* is a celebration of music and the guests are led on a journey of sight and sound.



Mickey's Soundsational Parade (Theisen May 2019).

The parade is designed in the style of a children's story book and each float of characters shares their style of music with the guests. The storyline is simple yet the adults can enjoy music from a variety of movies and styles and the children can dance to a multitude of beats while admiring their favorite characters. Disney combines live action movies and animation in one parade to celebrate one of the most important components of the Disney aesthetic -- the music. Disney utilizes their iconic sing-a-longs in new and exciting remixes while staying true to the tradition and nostalgia of the beloved music.

In order for Disney to be able to maintain the nostalgia, establish the narrative and exemplify the music, they must be consistent and everything must fall into place. Disney ensures that there is a synergy, or aesthetic, behind everything in the park, so there are no differences in characters -- from their individual worlds in the movies to the rides and character appearances in

the parks. There can be no moment where a little girl feels as if the Elsa she is hugging, and the Elsa she sings along with at home, are different people. There must be “dependable guest experiences” (Lantzer 41). Disney takes extreme measures to ensure that “one guest’s experience [does] not vary from either a different guest’s experience, nor from visit to visit” (Lantzer 41).

The step that truly elevates Disney productions above the rest is their attention to the most minute details surrounded their large scale shows and events. They focus on the small guest interactions that can happen at any moment in the parks. They want every guest that walks through the gates to leave with these small special moments that last a lifetime and creates the long-term guest relationships that brings people back to make more memories. Disney Imagineers promote the ideal that they are “in the business of creating memories” (Malmberg 23) and this is their guiding principle when choreographing shows and ensuring that there are special moments when performers can “break the fourth wall” and really connect with the guests. Butler University Alum and former Disney Cast Member, Rachel Jacobucci, explains that she tried in every show “to find a new little face in the audience, or a new interaction with someone on stage” and when their eyes light up “that’s what it’s all about” (Jacobucci). This is a key distinguishable characteristic, or aesthetic, that Disney has mastered to ensure lifelong memories and forever solidify Disney’s commercial brand in the hearts of devoted guests.

All of these elements work together to create the magic of Disney and it is impossible to pick just one element as the defining quality that out ranks the others. “The music serves the narrative and from there nostalgia is upheld and created” (Mohanty). But the key to understanding the sometimes mysterious aura of a Disney production is to dive deeper into how they utilize dance specifically to strengthen these qualities and create something truly unique.

III. Critical Aesthetic Elements

A. Necessity of Dance

Dance is a foundational element to the Disney magic and Disney showcases the value, talent, and passion of their dancers to inspire. Dance can express the joy not only felt by the performers but it feeds off the audience in a celebration for all to see. Dance is accessible to every age group at Disney as “it is one of the key elements that is most inviting to guests” (Mohanty). Dance allows the performers to develop a connection with the guests and bring them into the story. Ulka Mohanty, a choreographer for Walt Disney World’s Animal Kingdom, has been an independent contractor since 2017 and has choreographed amazing, intricate Disney shows such as *Rivers of Light* and *Up! A Great Bird Adventure*. Ms. Mohanty was drawn to apply for work at Disney because of the sheer scale of artistry that Disney is known for. “Dance is a great vehicle for storytelling and, at Disney, it is all about the storytelling” (Mohanty). Dance is quite technical and requires years of training to reach the caliber of professional dancers Mohanty loves to utilize. Mohanty is very specific in what she expects from her dancers. She allows for artistic expression, “I give strict guidelines on style, character, and movement execution but, finding out their own personal character and who they are as an artist within these structures I leave up to the artist” (Mohanty). The ability for choreographers to be able to trust their dances to develop their characters and carry on the show is vital in any ballet or dance company. But at Disney, there are high expectations of each cast member in terms of learning and retaining choreography, as well as performance caliber and personal improvement. Dance instills a work ethic in the artists that help elevate Disney productions to a whole new level.

Mohanty believes that Disney entertainment dancers are truly artists and are indispensable contributors to the artistic integrity of the production. Disney choreographers

acknowledge the special setting they are creating in and the history Disney has with its guests. It is vitally important for choreographers, such as Ms. Mohanty, to place an emphasis on allowing for artistic development and individual expression that is comparable to any professional dance company, regardless of the fact they are part of a world-wide commercial industry. This unique creative standard allows for Disney's productions to challenge and exceed artistic work created outside the realm of Disney. There is a special care for the steps and nostalgic narrative being portrayed that many professional artists are attracted to. As a result, Disney is viewed as a very legitimate option for professional work for current and aspiring dance professionals.

However, there are critics such as, former Disney performer, Ms. Krista Crowder who say "at the end of the day, I think if they [Disney] could get by without having dancers, (or live performers in general), they would...dance is in every show and parade, but again, if they could train monkeys to take over, they would" (Crowder). However, the artistry is what really makes Disney's use of dance exceptional. The parades and performances would not have the same genuine and personal feeling with audio-animatronics or non-human performers. The magic is felt through the dancers and without them the parades would not have the same energy. The audience feeds off of the performer's energy and vice versa.

Even though Disney productions are rigorously rehearsed and every detail is fine-tuned -- down to the correct way to wave -- it is the artistry on top of the details that ignites the performances and transports the guests to another world. This integral part of the Disney magic is why many choreographers at Disney believe artistry is first and foremost. There must be an element to every show that touches the audience and brings them into the world of Disney in a convincing and wholehearted way, a way only a dancer could conjure. The individual performers have the ability to create magic and individual memories for all watching the performance and

these are the moments that define Disney, and are what continues to bring guests back to the parks year-after-year.

Former Disney cast member, Nichol Mason, emphasized that dance “is an element that makes the Disney experience come to life” (Mason) and Disney’s unique employment of dance in the Disney parks is what makes them stand out from other theme parks. The use of live performers gives Disney the chance to develop special intimate guest interactions within a large scale production. “I remember how amazed the children were as I danced up to them. It was so fun to be a character that provoked such awe from the audience” (Mason). Dancers are able to give a special wave, wink, or say hello to guests as they walk by on their parade route with the goal of making someone’s day. “The heart of individual performers and the love of performing is why you see parade dancers make friends with families on the street, or contract dancers set up meet and greets to create some magic” (Crowder). In a company as large as The Walt Disney Company, they must look for little ways to “create something magical for guests” (Malmberg). The artistry and intent behind the professional dancers and choreographers is to properly convey a story or character that transforms a dancer waving at a little girl into Cinderella welcoming a young guest to her castle. These are carefully scrutinized decisions and the ability for the energy and performance of the dancers to stay consistent and provide a platform for magic is one of the most useful ways dance is utilized in the Disney parks.

Dance is a critical tool to the Disney aesthetic. It is increasingly important to promote the individual dancer’s vital role in continuing to conjure the magic as “every performance has to feel fresh and new to every new pair of eyes no matter how many years the performers have been doing the same show however many times” (Mohanty). The performers take this task very seriously as there is a culture at Disney that strives for excellence (Mohanty). The dancers carry

the narrative as they are telling the story in a very special nonverbal way (Bogaert). “There’s nothing worse than being excited to see a show and then seeing a dead performer on stage bringing down your feelings about the show and sometimes the whole day” (Crowder). The more Disney productions a dancer can be a part of, the more it helps them understand how Disney operates and better appreciate the exclusive experience of being a Disney dance performer. This, in turn, helps them continue to spread their magic by becoming Disney choreographers (Bogaert). As a result, the Disney philosophy and style is preserved and remains consistent, allowing future Disney Imagineers the ability to expand upon foundational expectations and adaptations.

This ability for Disney to strengthen their productions from within and help maintain the family values that Walt Disney instilled is exceedingly more important as the company becomes further removed from the life of the great Walt Disney. One loyal Disney guest stated that “the fans are always looking for more and more and as happy as we are with what they give us, we are always looking around to see what fun things are coming for us down the road and deep down we know they will exceed our expectations” (Avenger). This expectation to always keep innovating yet play to the child in all of us is a very high goal. But through dance and other park productions, Disney tries -- and accomplishes -- to do it all. The guiding principles of establishing a sense of nostalgia, explain the narrative, emphasizing the music, exemplifying consistency, and interacting with the guests in intimate ways always ensures that the Disney aesthetic is the basis for every new park innovation.

B. Creating Nostalgia

The spirit of nostalgia is felt in every aspect of The Walt Disney Company, the movies, the parks, the guests, and the employees themselves. Walt Disney accomplished the

incomprehensible and created an industry that goes beyond entertainment. Today, Disney has become a household name, but is also considered “home” to many. Disney has accomplished this through years of careful planning and impeccable execution of the company’s core values of creating “The Happiest Place on Earth” that families of all ages can enjoy. Family values are at the core of the company as the direct result of Walt Disney’s love for his daughters, and the inspiration they brought to him to create the Disneyland park (Lantzer 29). The moment a guest enters the gates of Disney and walks down Main Street USA for the first or the one-hundred-and-first time there is a feeling of being “home” and the worries of the outside world fade away. Walt Disney wanted to create an “emotional environment—where the look, feel, sounds, and smells invoked feelings and memories that seemed correct and authentic” (Lantzer 38).

Disney has a plethora of classic stories and characters that are portrayed in the parks by utilizing the amazing talents of the cast members. “There is definitely a certain kind of nostalgic exchange that happens when you work for Disney, and it’s difficult for passion not to show in that kind of situation” (Jacobucci). The performers know the power of the stories and characters they are portraying and they elevate the stories to touch the hearts of guests of all ages. “The Disney company has created a self-contained universe, which presents consistently recognizable values through recurring characters and familiar, repetitive themes” (Wasko 3). Wendy from *Peter Pan*, for example, was an inspiration to many children growing up and the values her character represents — innocence, compassion, and strength — are reignited when guests see her in the parks performing and spreading her joy to all. Disney achieves this unique experience in numerous ways. The overarching Disney aesthetic of nostalgia has a lot to do with the translation of screen to stage. There is a sense wonder when you see your favorite animation presented directly in front of you with the opportunity for you to create your own memories (Jacobucci).

When guests leave the magic of Disney and return home and watch their favorite movie, once again, there is a deeper connection with the story because you have added your own experience. Disney uses their story magic to not only create nostalgic but to create attachment (Lantzer xvi). “The nostalgia of the Disney productions is the most important element because the environment created is one that makes children and adults remember the joy they experienced when watching a film, connecting to a character, or remembering a pastime” (Mason). All of the aesthetic elements of Disney feed into each other and if one is without the other the product would not have the sparkle of the usual “Disney style.”

Besides Disney’s strong movie characters and the cast members adding their own passion, Disney creates nostalgia through tradition. One of the most nostalgic times to be at Disney is around the holidays. Whether it is the Christmas tree at the end of Main Street USA or the *Nightmare Before Christmas* overlay of the Haunted Mansion, Disney has many Christmas traditions. But one tradition that has been a part of Disneyland since its inaugural year in 1955 is the Holiday Parade. While the parade has undergone many transformations since then some key elements are still present. Starting on December 17, 1961, the iconic toy soldiers from *Babes in Toyland* made their debut in the twice-daily *Parade of the Toys* (d23.com).



Toy Soldiers 1961 (d23.com).



Toy Soldiers 2019 (disneyarks.disney.go.com).

These jolly toys have marched down Main Street USA in perfect unison playing their trumpets every holiday season including the new 2019 parade called *Mickey's Once Upon a Christmastime Parade*. The parade would not feel complete without the toy soldiers and their nostalgic appearance ringing in the New Year.

The theme park parades and productions serve as a special place for nostalgia as it can be felt in the music, the costumes, the characters themselves, but most uniquely in the choreography. Rachel Jacobucci was a part of a long standing tradition at Tokyo Disneyland called *One Man's Dream II*. The choreography was meticulously created and based around one theme so that “the dances were so well recognized and incorporated fully throughout the show that many of the guests learned the choreography and attempted to do it with us in the back or outside of the theatre” (Jacobucci). The simple steps incorporated throughout the production transcended the stage and implanted themselves within the heart of the guests allowing them to take the magic with them past the curtain call. The guests involvement in the show brings purpose to the steps and allows the production to continue to be treated as a nostalgic tradition. The joy the performers were able to emit to the crowd is exactly what makes the “Disney style”

so unique. The nostalgia will always be present, but according to Anderson Disney is always trying to “be fresh for our new guests and our many returning guests... We want them to see the things that they’ll remember and want to see again and also be thrilled by new things” (Avenger).

C. Developing Narrative

The Walt Disney Company has been home to the leading screenwriters in Hollywood since 1937 with the release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. They have formulated some of the most well-known and universally loved stories of all time. But Disney narratives do not stop with the movie screen. Their narratives are infused through every element of the theme parks. The parks are “a place designed so that every element contributes to telling a story” (Lantzer 50). This rings true with their theming in the different lands, the character performers, and parade and castle productions. Every time a little girl meets with Elsa there needs to be a continuation from the latest movie to the princess signing her autograph book.

But Disney formulates new stories within the parks that are unique for their parade productions. “What distinguishes our product is the fundamental decision to put creativity and story first and to infuse innovation into everything we do” (Malmberg 9). The Disney engineers, or “Imagineers,” use their talents to combine technology and imagination to create productions that go beyond the movies. They take the core values of iconic Disney characters and combine them into a larger narrative with multiple intertwining storylines. These overarching storylines have the same story structure as the movies, “the result is similar: a gasp of recognition, a boo for the villain, a cheer for the heroine, and an emotional connection among performers and audience, Imagineers and guests” (Malmberg 141). The narratives have certain elements that reach all age groups. “There is so much that children and adults take away from the stories that are presented

in front of them at all Disney shows, but the message is what really matters. Disney is constantly improving those messages and gearing them towards growth, positive development, and that sense of wondrous possibility in all of their productions” (Jacobucci). One of the most universal messages that is woven through Disney productions is to pursue your dreams no matter how crazy they may seem to others. Walt Disney famously said, “All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them” (forbes.com) and this philosophy is one that the Disney Imagineers have woven through the productions of all Disney parks. There is an underlying message of hope and the responsibility to help others. I remember being a little girl at Disneyland watching the grand firework show and the gentle voice of Jiminy Cricket singing the iconic song “*When you Wish Upon a Star*” and the narrators voice told the guests to close their eyes and wish for any dream no matter what, and I wished to one day dance down Main Street USA and this dream is still alive in me today. The impact felt by these productions stays with people many years removed and whenever I doubt my dream I think back to the moment where the power of Disneyland gave me the courage to fully accept my dream.

While Disney Imagineers want to spread hope and positivity to their guests they know that Disney has a certain reputation. From the opening of the Disneyland “people knew the Disney name and they trusted it” (Lantzer 33). This still applies today, when people watch a Disney production, they expect to see Mickey and his friends and Disney princesses, and the Imagineers know this and they take it one step further. When they design a Disney parade there are characters from all realms of the Disney company. There is always Mickey Mouse himself, the mouse in charge, animated characters brought to life from both Pixar and Disney Animation, and professional dancers representing a multitude of environments ranging from the wild west to under the sea. The Imagineers work with all of these strong and iconic characters with their

original stories and create a new storyline while staying true to each original story. There is a new narrative written to bring everyone together sharing one goal and objective. Frequently, the newly made narratives for parades, which unite separate character stories, fall under Mickey's jurisdiction.

Artistic Director of the "Entertainment Division" of Disneyland Paris, Kat de Blois, explained what the most crucial elements to a successful Disney production are, and noted that the number one element was having a great storyline. (Bogaert). Her main job is to manage and guide show directors, choreographers, and set designers. She explained that designing a show for Disney was a truly unique experience. "I loved creating *The Nutcracker Dreams Ballet* in the form of a Christmas parade. Most choreographers do it on stage with ballerinas. I had Disney characters and a lot of floats to work with" (Bogaert). Her job at Disney also gave her the unique challenge of telling a story in a nonverbal way in the show *Tarzan, The Encounter*, where she was only able to portray the story through acrobatics and gymnastics. De Blois also spoke to the changing wants and needs of the Disney guests as "today's guests expect a fast moving show that gives them an instant energy boost and precise, clear messages" (de Blois). The Imagineers are constantly reevaluating their productions to ensure it reaches the "Disney standard." Mrs. De Blois emphasized that the story behind the productions can be simple but it is the revealing of the story that is the most important. The story's setting also is pivotal to having a successful show. Within the setting, the characters need to be dynamic and interact with the guests, while creating "warmth, humor, and heartfelt moments" (de Blois). Many productions are done in open air venues as they want as many guests to experience their productions as possible, and sometimes this decision fits the story they are trying to tell, for example, the street is perfect for *Mickey's*

Halloween Treat in the Street! Show. Every element of Disney productions are chosen for a reason and most often it is to maintain the integrity of the narrative.

The 2011 *Mickey's Soundsational Parade* is a perfect example of a parade with a strong narrative involving dance. Mickey begins the parade by inviting everyone together to follow him in a jam session down Main Street USA in a celebration of music and color. Each element of the parade has its own music and rendition of the parade's theme in a style appropriate to the characters and their floats. Everything in the parade is designed to enhance the narrative as each float is very detailed and incorporates musical instruments into the design regardless of the time period of the world depicted. Tinker Bell's float included mushroom drums and the Aladdin float contained a massive brass gong. Each float is encouraged to bring as much joy as possible with bright colors and whimsy and fun. Every decision is made referencing the narrative the parade is trying to convey. *Mickey's Soundsational Parade* encourages everyone to have fun together as equals as they feature the rhythms of Latin America with the *Three Caballeros* float, powerful African drum beats with *The Lion King* float, and the southern styles of jazz and the blues on *The Princess and the Frog* float (Theisen May 2019 Visit). This specific parade featured more than 90 performers with one of the most important groups being the dancers. These professional dancers were key in adding excitement to the parade but they also were necessary in establishing the theme and environments of each float. When the *Three Caballeros* float passes by a number of flamenco dancers were accompanying it as they represent a very important part of the culture and they added the Disney special interaction with the crowd. The dancers add a personal excitement to the parade beyond just floats following each other. Disney dancers are engaging with the crowd and allow the narrative to be strengthened.



Spanish Dancers with the Three Caballeros Float (Theisen May 2019) Lion King Float (Theisen May 2019)



Princess and the Frog Dancers (Theisen May 2019)



The Little Mermaid Dancers (Theisen May 2019)

Dancers accompany each float in the Disney parades as they can add atmosphere to the Disney character and narrative being represented. The dancers bring the float to life and bring the

energy and performance down to the guests' level. This is especially true with *The Little Mermaid* float, where there were dancers that depict fish, coral, seaweed, and even water itself.



The Little Mermaid Float (Theisen May 2019).

Without the professional dancers, the parade's storyline would be not as interactive and immersive. A group of dancers that are iconic to Disney productions are the Chimney Sweeps from *Mary Poppins*. They bring the characters to life with their zeal and generosity from the screen to reality in *Mickey's Soundsational Parade*. The dancers' costumes and steps are derived directly from the movie to ensure the integrity of the narrative from the movie is preserved, but they enhance the parade's narrative by making music with their feet and brooms as they are celebrating the same message as Mickey, joining together to celebrate music and color.



Chimney Sweeps from Mary Poppins (Theisen May 2019).

D. Memorable Music

The music has been a staple of Disney movies since the beginning of Walt Disney's career with the first piece of animation to ever have sound, the famous Mickey Mouse short, *Steamboat Willie*, in 1928 (thewaltdisneycompany.com). This short was followed by a series of shorts named *Silly Symphonies* in the 1930s. These shorts were inspired solely by the music and used experimental animation skills and encouraged animators to grow and harness technological breakthroughs. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was the first feature length film to have a soundtrack recording album released for it and set the precedent for all future Disney movies. (d23.com). Every Disney movie has its signature power ballad that engrosses and inspires the audience. The music is a window into the soul of the characters and stays with the audience for years to come. Whether it was a sing-a-long VHS or just multiple viewings of classic Disney films most of the current generation grew up with Disney songs inspiring them since childhood. The classic music from Disney movies hold a great deal of emotion and nostalgia.

Legendary song writer Alan Menken was interviewed by ABC News about his body of work that has earned him eight Oscars and sixteen Golden Globes (Wood). Menken is still

currently writing music for new projects at Disney and he gave some insights into how the iconic music is written. “The first thing to know is that for most Disney animations the musical dramatists—a/k/a the songwriters—are brought in by the studio first” (Wood). According to Menken the Disney animators then explain the basic story they want to tell and together they figure out “the basic structure of telling the story, to what musical style you are going to use to tell the story with, [and] where the songs lie in that structure, then one-by-one [I] tackle those songs” (Wood). Once the musical dramatists have the key songs in place, the script and the storyboard are put together. The music and lyrics dictate a lot about the narrative. Menken explained that for his successful formula where he creates the song first, followed by the lyrics, and then a discussion with the animation team about the visuals. “We ask: Is it going to be a montage? Are they going to sing to each other?” (Wood). As with any Disney production, there is a tremendous creative collaboration to achieve the required standard for the Disney reputation.

The Disney icons Richard and Robert Sherman are legendary song writers as well. They composed over 200 songs for The Walt Disney Company and for use in films and theme parks. (Skywalker). They are well known for their musical scores for movies, such as *Mary Poppins* and *The Jungle Book*, and they were key contributors to the theme parks iconic musical scores for Disneyland’s *Enchanted Tiki Room* and *It’s a Small World*. Generations of Disney consumers were introduced to the world of Disney through the songs of the Sherman brothers. “Whether they know the names behind the songs or not, you’d be hard pressed to find a person alive who hasn’t at one time or another hummed one of the Shermans’ timeless tunes; even today, they remain the quintessential lyrical voice of Walt Disney” (d23.com). Walt Disney personally worked with these two men and their music became integral to the overall Disney philosophy as their theme in all their music was “that it doesn’t take much to give a little kindness” (d23.com)

and this really registered with Walt Disney and shaped the future of his parks. He brought the songs and music into the parks for the first time in the early 1960s. Walt Disney did this so the music would take the guests to a place where they would forget about standing in the long lines – “it just takes you away” (*The Boys: The Sherman Brothers’ Story*).

The Sherman Brothers also helped create the narrative of *Mary Poppins*, not through script writing but, by the themes introduced in their music. Richard Sherman maintained the approach that “the songs were also extensions of Walt Disney’s love of humanity and direct offshoots of his dreams” (Skywalker). The immense importance placed on the music in the foundation of The Walt Disney Company continues today and continues to grow in the theme parks as professional dancers and other performers continue to evoke these themes in live performances, which certainly places Disney apart from its competitors.

Another iconic song “*It’s a Small World*” resulted from an assignment the Sherman brothers were given by Walt Disney for the UNICEF Salutes the Children of the World at the 1964 World’s Fair (*The Boys: The Sherman Brothers’ Story*). He asked them to write one song that could cover everything for millions of children. The Sherman brothers said “people think it’s a little novelty song, but it is really a prayer for peace.” (*The Boys: The Sherman Brothers’ Story*).

Many Disney park guests agree that sounds, particularly music, make up a large part of the theme park experience and evoke strong memories with every visit (Skywalker). Many times the music in the parks is taken directly from the movies themselves, or they are rerecorded to fit the needs of the park. For example, the classic waltz from the movie *Up* has been rerecorded with different instruments to fit the atmosphere of Main Street USA. The music that fills the theme parks are regularly used to build the atmosphere of Disneyland and bring you into the

“fantasy” of the parks and away from the demands of real life. The music is primarily reprised of familiar tunes or reminiscent of classic Disney films to build the nostalgic feeling of visiting the parks. The storylines and narratives take the guests through the parks, but it is truly the music that guides them (Avenger). The music is able to tie together all the ideas of the Imagineers together and encompass the attraction as a whole unique experience for the guests. The parades and other park productions utilize the vast music library of The Walt Disney Company to piece together their own unique spin for live performances. *Mickey’s Soundsational Parade* is a prime example of the power of music in a parade as the whole parade is centered around celebrating the music. The parade includes musical selections such as “*Arabian Nights*,” “*Under the Sea*,” and “*Some Day My Prince Will Come*” and many other favorites. They utilize live musicians especially drummers to bring the music alive, along with all the dancers. They can give the music their energy and perfectly sculpt the songs to the power of the parade. If the original songs are playing they are rerecorded with chorus singers and different instruments as everything needs to be creative and new. The Imagineers want the parade to stand out as its own piece of Disney.

However, not all parades use music based off of movies. Tara Anderson, Senior Director at Walt Disney Parks and Resorts Creative Entertainment, was interviewed by Greg Ehrbar, a writer and author for Disney’s Yellow Shoes Creative Group, about her work with *Mickey’s ‘Boo-to-You’ Halloween Parade*. The parade follows the narrative of Mickey and his Magic Kingdom friends having a series of parties to celebrate the holiday, as well as a trip to Adventureland with Pirates and Peter Pan. “There’s no question that every parade really starts with the music” (Anderson) and for this specific parade there is a song written specifically for the parade *Boo to You*. “It’s so catchy, we find ourselves still singing this tune to ourselves six months into the next year!” (Anderson). Besides movies or originals pieces, the music can also

be adapted from classic park music such as music from the Haunted Mansion and The Pirates of the Caribbean. Each section of the parade receives its own music that relates to the characters and dancers performing but also to the overarching musical theme.

The music is vital to the dancers and performers in the productions. The Sherman Brothers spoke of how “Walt Disney always knew music could deliver far more emotional impact than merely words. We teamed his unparalleled optimism with our own to fuel the creative process. We will forever be grateful for the many wonderful opportunities Walt afforded us,” (disneyarks.disney.go.com). The emotion that is felt in the songs guests grew up with help the dancers deliver impactful performances. The music supplies a tool to pull energy from and deliver meaningful performances. The dancers’ most important job is to connect with the guests and help them form memories that last a lifetime and the music aids the dancers in this vitally important task. In visits to other theme parks, such as Universal Studios, I witnessed that their parades utilized generic action music or newly written parade music. This music, while adding another level to the performance, often times falls flat and feels out of place with their floats. There is a disconnect between the characters and the music that leads to a lack of emotion. As a result, these parades have a much lower production value than Disney productions where emotions and magic lead the way. The Disney productions have a more polished and professional feel due to the extensive attention to detail that is essential to meaningful memory making. Disney parades are not just a float with music going by, but they are interactive and take the guests on a journey with the music leading them to a place of magic.

On a more practical point, the music also gives the dancers cues on when different choreography should be executed to ensure a consistent performance. The music provides the structure for which the choreography is built around and ensures the proper tempo for the

dancers. *Mickey's Soundsational Parade's* musical score was composed and arranged by Mark Hammond with the tempo of 132 beats per minute, the fastest that Disney has ever done (allears.net). Parade choreography is very specific and “many steps and sequences are repeated during the course of a parade or show, and the segments are repeated multiple times until the route is completed” (Mason). The segments of repeated choreography are referred to as units and are spaced out enough so no guest sees the same sequence of steps (Crowder). The repetition and specificity of the steps require the dancers to be attuned to the music to stay together and consistent the entire parade route. The music also cues the dancers when they have moments to interact with the crowd. “Interactions were choreographed at times within breaks in the music and choreography” (Mason). The dancers hear breaks in the chorus of the music and allow them to look out into the guests and show them the passion that brought them to work at Disney. Everything in a Disney production must follow the plan and music dictates and leads the schedule along. This schedule and structure supplied by the music allows for Disney productions to stay consistent multiple times a day and year-to-year.

E. Maintaining Consistency

Among the most well-known trademark sayings in the world is that Disneyland is “The Happiest Place on Earth” and The Walt Disney Company ensures this statement with their company’s consistency. “The attractions and shows were consistent and repetitive, and thus one guest’s experience did not vary from either a different guest’s experience, nor from visit to visit” (Lantzer 41). Ideally, every guest should leave the parks feeling the same way and the only variance is what attractions or restaurants they attended while adding their memories on top of the dependable guest experience leading to a “magical day.” Disney has many different ways to ensure this level of consistency throughout the parks and beyond.

Every element of The Walt Disney Company is a part of what they call “synergy.” Synergy has been a part of the company since the beginning and Walt Disney himself was a big proponent of the strategy. Synergy is when two or more divisions of a company increase value by working together. For example, Disney’s theme parks are all used as large-scale advertising tools. The parks use characters from the movies to promote the parks and they use the parks to promote the movies (Kalb). The company assesses the ways its narratives and characters are used in the parks, motion pictures, publishing, licensing, and a wide variety of merchandise based off of them. (Lantzer xv). Besides the money component of Disney’s synergy, they use synergy to ensure that their characters remain consistent and true regardless of the form they are presented in. There needs to be a seamless use of Nemo, for example, in all of the company’s products. Nemo needs to be the same Nemo on a lunch box or plush toy as in the movie. “Disney is perhaps the epitome of a corporation that understands and utilizes the concept... for what Disney is doing is constructing a story for its guests that is the same wherever and whenever it is encountered” (Lantzer xv). This consistency created by the principle of synergy is prevalent in the parks and especially in the parade and park productions.

Disney entertainment develops new parades to ensure the excitement never stalls on their beloved productions. New costumes, music, and float layouts are reinvented to keep the guests guessing about what new thing Disney has developed. However, one thing they are not guessing about is how the characters are going to look. The main characters must stay consistent and present themselves in a way that is immediately recognizable regardless of the platform. *Frozen*’s Elsa has grown in popularity drastically over the span of the last five years, with a new movie being released adding more costumes to the repertoire for Disney designers to work with. But when Elsa approaches on the parade route she is instantly identifiable. Disneyland’s new

parade *Magic Happens*, that premiered in March of 2020, has taken the beloved character and placed her into the environment of her new movie with a float that appears to have been pulled directly from the enchanted forest. Regardless of the much larger scale and new color scheme, the iconic Anna and Elsa are still smiling and waving together inspiring new guests every day.



Anna and Elsa from Festival of Fantasy (Theisen Oct 2015)

Anna and Elsa from Magic Happens (Theisen March 2020)

The parade designers are given more creative leeway when it comes to the presentation of the dancers. They can really play with the themes of the iconic narratives to present the dancers in such a way that they truly add to the aura of the float and act as set pieces to the approaching main characters. Even if the dancers do not represent an actual character or element from the movies, they are consistent with the theming felt throughout the movie. Disneyland's *Magic Happens* parade has dancers before each float exciting the crowd and building the anticipation of

the main characters' appearances. Whether they are representing *Moana*'s water or *Frozen II*'s enchanted forest, the dancers add an irreplaceable element not only with the ability to excite the crowd, but they allow the environment of the movies to reach past the float and interact with the guests while staying consistent with the theming.



Frozen II Dancers (Theisen March 2020)



Moana Dancers (Theisen March 2020)

Consistency in the Disney parades is applied on multiple levels. The performers, themselves, contribute to the consistency of the production. Choreographer, Ulka Mohanty, emphasized that “every performance has to feel fresh and new to every new pair of eyes no matter how many years the performers have been doing the same show however many times” (Mohanty). This is guaranteed by the strict quality control Disney has on their productions in the rehearsal process and beyond. “The incredibly organized and planned out way that Disney runs their rehearsals ensures that the product is always at or beyond the prestigious Disney standard level” (Jacobucci). There are multiple levels of leadership set up to ensure the consistency and integrity of the work beyond the choreographer. The dance captains and maintenance choreographers watch the parade every run and take notes to improve each cast member and the flow of the show so that the parade continues to improve and does not diminish in spirit the

longer the show is presented (Crowder). The choreographers may tweak small elements of the parade or have “the flexibility to add and take away, but the core is so solid you can do that” and the parade remains the same but is also fresh in the guests’ eyes (Anderson). The dancers have to take a certain responsibility onto themselves and find their passion and love for dance and Disney to make each performance appear as their first stroll down Main Street USA. Ms. Crowder spoke about how the cast would give each other pep talks to make it through the long days and they would help maintain and encourage each other’s passions.

The consistency of the Disney parades require a lot of work on behalf of the professional dancers and choreographers, but the Imagineers and other design specialists at Disney look at consistency from a different angle. They ensure that the characters and narratives are maintained regardless of the venue. “Certain themes are pulled from the animation, most specifically in terms of movement, facial expression, and general look and costuming that are applied with the effect of completely submerging you in the magical world of your favorite Disney movies” (Jacobucci). Every decision is made to enhance the “immersive entertainment” (Malmberg 10) aspect of the parades. Even if the characters or productions are not themed after movies they are still consistent and “reminiscent of that classic animation style that Disney is so known for” (Jacobucci).

F. Magical Moments

Live performances allow Disney to create magical moments with their guests unlike any other entertainment format Disney utilizes. The performers are able to adjust their performance to the crowd and give guests individual memories to cherish. In addition, meet and greets with Disney characters are essential to the Disney theme park experience. These are the experiences where small children and adults are able to form concrete bonds with the characters that stay

with them for a lifetime. The parades carry these intimate connections with the guests to a much larger scale while still emphasizing the personal touch. The dancers and performers acknowledge the importance of this aspect of their jobs and take their performances very seriously. Their commitment to their characters and the story they represent enhances the other fundamental elements of the Disney aesthetic. The audience can feel the energy of the cast and it is important to continue to increase the energy as the parades continues (Locke). To ensure that the performers in the parade have time to genuinely connect with people there are both preset plans for interaction and spontaneous moments throughout the parade route and production.

The preset plans for interaction are safeguards to provide consistent experiences for all guests. If the interactions were entirely improvised the parade would lack the regulation that is key to maintaining Disney's quality and consistency of the parade. These preset interactions appear to be improvised due to the talent and commitment of the cast members. The performers approach these breaks in the music with the same enthusiasm as the rest of the choreography to keep everyone engrossed in the parade. The preset interactions allow for the cast members to take children with them to dance for a few bars of music and immerse them completely into the parade. If there was no previous plan it may be difficult for the performers to return the children to their proper spot. The *Pixar Play* parade is known for the amount of guest interactions as almost every unit allows for guest participation. The planning behind the parade guarantees that different children are given the opportunity to join in the fun. The guests are able to dance alongside their favorite characters and leave the performance with bragging rights as they were one of the lucky ones to have this unique opportunity. It is essential that the guests continue to feel special. The dancers help the guests feel the energy of the parade and enjoy the music all

while having fun. Their job is “more about the interaction becoming the experience” and engaging entertainment for all ages (Malmberg 40).

There is a unique place for the dancers in parade routes. Their role cannot be replicated by the characters on the physical floats due to space limitations. Safety is a primary concern with The Walt Disney Company and each main character is secured into their position on their float and they are not able to step down to the physical Main Street. The dancers fill this void and ensure that the street is full of enthusiasm and movement. They are able to move around the floats as needed and bring energy and encourage participation from the crowd. The dancers create various levels to the parade and create visual magic with perfect lines and inviting performances. They may not portray main characters, but their performances are vital to selling each segment as immersive and continually transport the guests into the land of the Disney movies. The dancers create an aura around the characters and bring the float to guest level. Their performance elevates the parade from a string of floats to a multitude of immersive environments of beloved characters coming to see and inspire the guests. Their smiling faces and ability to walk next to the crowd is imperative to the success of the parades as they are the characters with the highest probability to make a personal connection with the guests. Disneyland’s *Magic Happens* parade is full of special guest interactions. One of the most successful was “The Kakamora” people from *Moana*. The dancers had actual coconut props that the guests were able to touch and interact with.



The Kakamora interaction from Moana (Theisen March 2020)

As part of the present guest participation, the dancers and performers have specific choreography instructing them on when to complete their dance routines and when to wave and engage with the crowd. While completing field research and viewing *Mickey's Soundsational Parade* at Disneyland, I was able to observe the very beginning of the parade, before it even approached the crowd. This gave a unique perspective to the parade route as the dancers and cast members came out of the gates in full performance mode. Even though there were no guests lining the parade route at that point in time, the performers were still executing all their wave choreography and interaction moments regardless of the lack of audiences. I watched the parade a number of times to witness and validate the consistency of their interactions and, each time, they fell within breaks in the music and choreography. The parade route consisted of blocks of choreography followed by breaks to interact and mingle with the guests. Then, there was a musical cue for the performers to fall back into their ensemble mode and continue the choreography. The transitions were executed flawlessly. However, not every moment was the

same. Choreographers, such as Mohanty, give strict guidelines regarding style, character and movement execution but they also allow the performers artistic expression. This expression is commonly manifested within the guest interaction times and the cast members are able to continually keep their performances fresh. “I had some go to things I would do if the audience wasn’t being particularly participatory, but I was always on the lookout for someone to interact with in a new and exciting way. It’s like any conversation, you have to read the crowd” (Jacobucci). This artistic expression allows for the interactions to feel genuine and for the interactions to fit the specific crowd. A moment that has remained special in my own Disney experience was while watching the *Disney Festival of Fantasy* parade, where Flynn Rider, from Disney’s *Tangled*, spotted my “birthday pin” and used one of his breaks in choreography to point to me and wish me happy birthday. This ability for the cast member to have freedom to feel out the crowd allows for more personable interactions and add to the Disney philosophy of “The Happiest Place on Earth!”



Flynn Rider on the Tangled Float (Theisen Oct 2015).

Not all performances allow for this flexibility of character and guest interaction. Disney performers have their own meet and greets sessions after stage shows. For example, Walt Disney

World's show *Festival of the Lion King* does not have a lot of guest interaction time or a moment that is not choreographed, so the dancers set up back stage "meet and greets" to create some personal magic for young dancers. "I really loved meeting little dancers back stage at *Festival of the Lion King*. They always thought our blue shoes were so cool and I enjoyed having them show me positions and arms or what they were learning in their dance classes" (Crowder). The heart of the performers and their love for Disney is why dancers make connections with families on the streets or backstage and ensure that magic is created and upheld. Without the passion of the dancers and performers these special moments would lack the finesse that places Disney performances in the hearts of all those who witness the magic.

IV: Revitalizing Rehearsals

The aura that surrounds The Walt Disney Company places different expectations on the theme park's entertainment department. Beneath the Disney magic, they operate like any other dance company: rehearsing, reaching for deadlines, and striving for perfection. And, sadly, this side of Disney does not always match up with people's expectations for "The Happiest Place on Earth." However, to maintain such an esteemed position, high standards must be maintained. The theme parks constantly are adding new content to their entertainment as they understand the importance of updating and ensuring no production appears stale or overperformed. "It's sort of like a great Broadway show. It might be revived dozens of times, but there are always alternations, the score changes, the chemistry of the cast varies and scenes are moved around. It's always fresh" (Anderson). The classic productions such as *The Mainstreet Electrical Parade* and the annual Holiday Parade benefit from occasional revitalizations as Senior Director at the Walt Disney Parks and Resorts Creative Entertainment, Tara Anderson, explains that the shows have the flexibility to their structure and they are able to tweak them by removing or adding to the

production without losing the integrity of the production (Avenger). The creative teams ensure that the core is solid enough that every time the show is altered the Disney aesthetic elements are not.

In order to guarantee such success, The Disneyland and Walt Disney World Resort choreographers and directors have a streamlined audition and rehearsal process. Productions are given a month of rehearsal time, for example, the *Mickey's Boo to You Halloween Parade* that opened on September 1st only began rehearsals at the beginning of August. "There are certain expectations for the cast members in terms of learning, retention, performance, and improvement" (Mohanty) that are vital when putting together a large scale production in such a short period. The audition process reflects this. I auditioned for Walt Disney World's *Festival of the Lion King* in March of 2020 and could immediately feel the casting directors' professional outlook for the group in front of them. Regardless of the talent or age of the auditioning dancers, they treated each person with the utmost respect and repeatedly explained how thankful they were for each person and their talents before each round of cuts. The Disney magic was felt in the room through the positivity of the rehearsal dance captains and the routines performed, but the casting directors wasted no time to cut the room from 150 dancers to 40. The directors knew exactly what type of dancer and what look they were going to hire. It was important for each person to show their performance skills, their talent level, but also it was vital to pick up the choreography quickly and accurately to survive the cuts. Each group was only given one chance to demonstrate their skill until the last twenty dancers. Once it was down to such a small number, they allowed two run-throughs. However, the intensity surrounding the audition is not unique to just the Disney parks, each professional dance company has to pursue such a tedious and sometimes cruel process. The Walt Disney Company has found a way to limit the number of

negative emotions and they tried their best to keep spirits high and focus on the vision of the show and not necessarily the lack of talent when letting people go. They treated the dancers as people and not just a number. I was truly impressed by the entire experience, and even though I was not offered a job this time, I look forward to auditioning again.

The intensity and specificity demonstrated in the audition carry over into the rehearsal process. Choreographers such as Michelle Paxton at the Disneyland Resort have the crucial job of maintaining creative content. Before rehearsals begin, she has to prep what to teach by formulating a vision with the director of the show. She then preps choreography for a 4-8 hour rehearsal day (Rafferty). Mohanty, a choreographer for Walt Disney World's Animal Kingdom, begins her work on her own by crafting the general layout of the piece before getting into the studio with the cast members. "I have guidelines of what the constraints of a show need to be, but other than that I have free reign" (Mohanty). The rehearsals are highly structured in order to get through as much movement and cleaning as possible in the time allowed (Mason). For the rehearsals to run smoothly there are different ranked positions. The main choreographer has most of the say as it is their choreography and movement style being presented. There are dance captains to help with the setting of the choreography and clarification of steps for the dancers. Finally, there are maintenance choreographers, point persons, to ensure the integrity of the show and run it daily as fatigue and habit may affect the cast members (Crowder). After each run of a parade, there are post-parade meetings to discuss the successes and the opportunities for improvement (Avenger). The "point person" walks with each float taking notes on the performers and guest interactions to guarantee the Disney aesthetic is reached each performance regardless of time or show number (Theisen May 2019 Visit).

Paxton explained that for new cast members they like to begin with small rehearsal to help and encourage the performers to be the best they can be on a more personal level before large run-throughs may prevent personal corrections (Rafferty). There is a natural progression from dancer to choreographer within the Disney entertainment group and positive reinforcement and care for each cast



Gravediggers from Mickey's Boo to You Halloween Parade (disneywicksey.com)

member ensures this as most Disney choreographers were Disney performers first (Rafferty). The personal rehearsals allow the dancers to have fun and delve into their characters. For example, during the *Mickey's Boo to You Halloween Parade* rehearsal, the gravediggers were messing around backstage when they discovered their shovels create a certain spark when hit on the ground. This was groundbreaking to Ms. Anderson and she immediately added it to the show (Avenger). These moments and the motivation the dancers give each other allow for them to give consistent, extraordinary performances day-after-day.

V: What Makes Disney Different – The Disney Philosophy

The Walt Disney Company has revolutionized the use of choreography and dance in commercial settings to showcase the value, talent, and passion of the dancer while impacting and inspiring their guests. This has led to the development of their signature style felt throughout all of their productions. Dance is vital to the Disney aesthetic as they use the art form to illuminate the “Magic.” People have very high expectations for the Disney brand, especially the theme parks. To make sure that the Disney quality is upheld they utilize their foundational rules and

promote their trademark style. The creative teams ensure that the core of their productions are solid enough that every time a show or parade is altered the Disney aesthetic elements are not. Through dance, Disney is able to establish a sense of nostalgia, explain the narrative, emphasize the music, exemplify their consistency, and interact with the guests in a special way. The productions that make Disney who they are today use dance to elevate the standards and use live action performers to add extra sparkle to their guests' experiences. The performers are able to make characters from the screen come alive and take these memorable movies and characters a step further while remaining consistent and maintaining synergy in all productions, which is critical to the Disney aesthetic. All of these elements work together to create the magic of Disney and it is impossible to pick just one element as a defining quality that outranks the others.

The Disney philosophy in the theme parks is to take their very successful entertainment material and elevate it to new heights -- fully immersing their guests and bringing them into the magical world of Disney with meticulous details and extraordinary excitement. Dance is one of the most meaningful ways in which cast members can personally interact with their guests and add the extra Disney Magic. As a result, dance plays a significant role in what makes Disney unique and exemplifies the trademark characteristics of the Disney aesthetic ensuring the integrity and quality of the Disney name, and therefore, making dance a necessity in creating "The Happiest Place on Earth."

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Interview Questions

Dancers and Performers – Thesis Research Questions

1. Why did you join Disney entertainment and ultimately why did you leave?
2. What is your favorite Disney performance moment and why?
3. Do you feel that Disney showcases the value, talent and passion of their dancers?
4. Do you feel that dance is a foundational element to the Disney magic?
5. What, in your opinion, are the defining characteristics of the Disney aesthetic and how does dance exemplify the Disney trademarks in the parks?

6. What characteristic of Disney park productions do you think is the most important: the music, the narrative, nostalgia, the consistency, or guest—performer special interactions?
7. Disney is known for its quality and dependable guest experience, did you have any moments where you felt as though you connected to the audience in a special way while performing?
8. Do you think the way Disney choreographers structure their rehearsals helps create and maintain the vision of the Disney style regardless of the production?
9. Were there any steps or signature sequences that repeated itself in the choreography within a show or across productions?
10. Did you have any input or a chance to put add your own style on the choreography or was the rehearsal process structured and you had to meld to your part?
11. When you interact with guests (i.e., little waves, dancing together, or a simple acknowledgment) do you have a preset plan and location or is it spontaneous?
12. Do you have any other special experiences to share about your time with Disney?

Choreographers – Thesis Research Questions

1. Why did you join Disney entertainment and ultimately why did you leave?
2. What is your favorite Disney performance moment that you created and why?
3. Do you feel that Disney showcases the value, talent and passion of their dancers?
4. Do you feel that dance is a foundational element to the Disney magic?
5. What, in your opinion, are the defining characteristics of the Disney aesthetic and how does dance exemplify the Disney trademarks in the parks?
6. What characteristic of Disney park productions do you think is the most important: the music, the narrative, nostalgia, the consistency, or guest—performer special interactions?
7. Do you think the way you and other Disney choreographers structure their rehearsals helps create and maintain the vision of the Disney style regardless of the production?
8. How much work goes into preparing for a Disney production and the intense rehearsal process?
9. Is there a synergy formula to parade choreography or do you have free reign?
10. Do you find yourself repeating or staying with a certain style of step when choreographing for a parade?

11. What is it like revamping and resetting a parade year after year such as the Christmas Fantasy Parade?
12. In your choreography do you allow your performers freedom with their characters or do you choreograph every moment of the parade or production?
13. Do you have any other special experiences to share about your time with Disney that could help me with my project?